



State Representative

Sandy Nafis

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Serving the 27th District - Newington

Session 2005

Dear Friends:

Another legislative session has come to a close, and it has been a challenging and productive year with many landmark legislative initiatives.

We entered the session with some uncertainty in light of stagnant economic forecasts. Fortunately, the climate improved and resulted in a current year budget surplus, which allowed us to address some of the individual and community needs that had been neglected during our recent economic downturn. Newington will continue to gain municipal aid dollars for education and property tax relief, and the legislature is committed to working toward meaningful property tax reform to help our communities in the future. An additional step to provide greater fiscal responsibility also occurred this session – a task force will begin serious review of performance-based budgeting, which will provide increased accountability to our taxpayers.

This newsletter highlights some of the legislation that was passed and designed to protect our children, our seniors, our veterans, our consumers, and our quality of life. As always, please feel free to call me if you have any questions and to share your ideas, concerns, and suggestions. Together, we can make a difference, both today and in the future.

Sincerely,

Sandy

2005-2006

STATE MONEY FOR NEWINGTON!

State funds allocated to Newington amount to **\$12,628,422** - up from last year's **\$12,060,679**, an increase of **\$567,742** - **nearly five percent!**

PILOT: State Owned Property	\$	762,901
PILOT: Colleges & Hospitals		429,238
Pequot/Mohegan Aid		326,840
Town Aid Road Fund		199,520
Local Capital Improvement Program		211,149
Education Cost Sharing (ECS)		10,317,849
Adult Education		23,387
School Transportation (Public)		346,853
School Transportation (Private)		10,684

Education

Continuing our commitment to education, this session the legislature:

- Set up a textbook summit to investigate and report on the cost of required materials at the college level.
(Public Act 05-03 June Special Session)
- Created an Early Childhood Education Cabinet to coordinate resources across agencies and promote quality among early childhood development and education programs.
(Public Act 05-245)
- Required the Department of Education and the Department of Public Health to develop guidelines for managing students with life-threatening food allergies. (Public Act 05-104)
- Required the education commissioner to develop a statewide developmentally appropriate assessment tool to measure a child's readiness for kindergarten.
(Public Act 05-245)
- Allowed the State Department of Education to establish a pilot program to use technology in providing computer-assisted writing, instructions, and testing for 9th and 10th grade students in public school. (Public Act 05-245)

Environment

Keeping our Public Lands Clean

To preserve the pristine beauty of Connecticut's public lands, a number of provisions were enacted to further enforcement, increase fines and deter vandalism. In addition, since vandalism often accompanies trespass, the law expands the list of activities that constitute trespassing. (Public Act 05-234)



capitol update

Consumer News

- Effective October 1, 2005, consumers will be able to spend gift cards when they choose - there will be **no expiration date** on spending gift cards, nor will the state be able to claim the unspent funds. (Public Act 05-189)
- Connecticut is one of the first states in the country to adopt legislation that prevents listing customers in cell phone directories without their permission. (Public Act 05-241)
- Wineries will be able to ship wine directly to consumers. (Public Act 05-274)

Protections against Identity Theft

- Consumers will be able to freeze their credit report, and credit rating agencies are prohibited from releasing reports without the consumer's permission. (Public Act 05-148)
- Businesses that have suffered a security loss involving such personal customer information as name, address, social security number or credit card information are required to **disclose** the breach - in writing - to all affected consumers. (Public Act 05-148)
- Potential victims of identity theft will be able to obtain important bank information from financial records in which all or some of the fraudulent activity may have taken place. (Public Act 05-62)



Eminent Domain Review

In response to the U.S. Supreme Court's decision authorizing the public taking of private property for private use in *Kelo v. City of New London*, the public is asking, "How could this be?" and "Is my property next?" Legislative committees held informational forums and public hearings this summer so we could better understand the issue and identify reasonable ways our current laws may be amended to protect the rights of our citizens, while maintaining a balance with legitimate development issues. This process will continue into the fall as we work toward positive resolution.



Government

Ethics in State Contracting

In Public Act 05-287 we made changes to the following:

- state contracting laws and penalties for ethics violations
- the contract award process
- gift restrictions and reporting
- whistleblower statutes
- lobbyist reporting requirements

In addition, any public official or state employee convicted of a crime related to state employment is prohibited from seeking out or taking a job as a lobbyist.

Protecting Voters' Rights

One new law on election reform (Public Act 05-235)

- introduces a paper trail for absentee ballots
- allows voters to register up to seven days before the election
- makes the process of restoring voting rights more efficient

Another election reform law, Public Act 05-188, contains

- voter-verified paper ballots on all new electronic voting machines
- an on-line voter guide and a study on push polling
- increased disclosure of campaign ad payment and the candidates' endorsement that they "approved this ad."

Fiscal Accountability of State Government

In response to calls from the public to clean up government and make public officials more accountable, we passed a law requiring greater fiscal accountability in government.

- The Office of Fiscal Analysis (OFA) and the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) must present budget and financial information to the Appropriations Committee and the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee by November 15.
- All bills that state agencies file with the House and Senate Clerks must include fiscal notes.
- The State Bond Commission is to have its agenda available at least four days prior to its meeting. (Public Act 05-262)



Restaurant Safety - Greg Lanza's bill

When Greg Lanza died tragically in a choking accident at a restaurant in late 2003, his family was compelled to try to prevent the same tragedy from happening to others. Thanks to his wife, Kim, his children, Christean, Vinny and Michael, his sister, Rose, his nephew, John, along with brothers, nephews and nieces, we were able to pass legislation in Greg's memory that will help educate restaurant workers to recognize the signs of choking and understand appropriate procedures if choking occurs. (Public Act 05-134)



Insurance News

Breast Cancer Screening State lawmakers approved legislation requiring that insurers cover ultrasound screenings for breast cancer if a doctor recommends them. (Public Act 05-69)

Small Businesses To help small businesses meet the challenge of rising health insurance costs, we have provided greater flexibility in insurance policies, savings to small employers, and increased access to the MEHIP program, administered by the state Comptroller's office. In addition, the bill extends MEHIP benefits to individuals eligible for retirement benefits and to federally qualified nonprofits that receive public funds or contract with the state, and labor unions. (Public Act 05-238)

Pharmaceutical Patient Assistance Programs The House voted unanimously to establish the Pharmacy Outreach Program. Instead of visiting several websites or calling drug companies to sign up for their reduced- or no-cost drug programs, you will find "one-stop shopping" for information about all available voluntary drug assistance programs. (Public Act 05-269)

External Appeals Available If you have been denied services or hospitalization and lost your appeal with the MCO or health insurer, you now have another appeal option. You can file an appeal with the Insurance Commissioner once all internal appeals have been exhausted. The MCO or health insurer must also provide the external appeals forms to you. (Public Act 05-94)

Veteran's Death Benefit A benefit was approved for certain family members of soldiers who are killed in action or who die from illness or injury resulting from active-duty service in Afghanistan or Iraq between September 11, 2001, and July 1, 2006. (Public Act 05-03 June Special Session)

News Briefs

Assistance for Defense Manufacturers' Suppliers

Facing a highly competitive, ever-changing marketplace, small- and medium-sized manufacturers that support Connecticut's large defense contractors now will have access to \$1 million in advanced training in new technologies, new facilities and equipment through the new collaborative center at the Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology (CCAT). (Public Act 05-143)

Carbon Monoxide Detectors in New Houses A new law requires the installation of carbon monoxide detectors and warning equipment in all new construction of one- and two- family houses. (Public Act 05-161)

Improving Crime Victim Notification The Department of Correction must inform the Office of Victim Services of the release of an inmate on re-entry furlough into the community. The Office of Victim Services is responsible for then notifying, by certified mail, the victims who requested notification of the inmate's release. (Public Act 05-68)

Teachers' Retirement \$30 million from surplus will be deposited in the Teachers' Retirement Fund over the next two years. More is needed to put the fund on a sound actuarial basis, and it is my hope that we will continue to close this gap.

Regulation of Telecommunications Services In response to numerous Newington and statewide residents' concerns, we passed a law to provide more telecommunications choices for Connecticut's customers. Although the Governor vetoed this bill, we look forward to a possible compromise in the future. (Public Act 05-231)

Seniors

- To provide more focused assistance to our senior population, we enlarged the Commission on Aging and moved it from the Department of Social Services to the legislative branch for administrative purposes. (Public Act 05-77) In addition, the Department on Aging will be a separate agency effective January 1, 2007, and no longer part of the Department of Social Services. (Public Act 05-280)
- The Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders raised the asset limits from \$19,020 for singles to \$28,530, and from \$28,530 to \$38,040 for married couples, effective April 1, 2007. (Public Act 05-280)
- As of 2008, 50% of federally taxable military retirement pay will be exempted from the state income tax. (Public Act 05-251)
- The maximum prize for bingo games designed for senior citizens increases from \$5 to \$20. (Public Act 05-11)



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